1: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938) 1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

Nyakyusa families have crossed the Poroto mountains and settled in Safwa and Nyika country. They have moved, primarily, to secure good pasture, fertile garden land, and accessible markets; and the accounts of Nyakyusa history which we have suggest that the first two of these motives have long been in operation. There is no sign of these Nyakyusa immigrants being absorbed by the previous occupants of the country. Indeed, were it not for the intervention of the Administration, it seems that the Nyakyusa immigrants might soon dominate the less organized Safwa and Nyika. As it is, certain of the Safwa and Nyika Native Authority Courts are conducting proceedings in Nyakyusa as well as in their own languages,[1] a fact which supports the Nyakyusa boast that all their neighbours are learning their language. Many Kinga, Mahasi, Wanji, and Poroto are said to learn to speak Nyakyusa, though there are few Nyakyusa settlers among them, since they find the language useful in external contacts.[2] The Kinga tell a myth of how they, together with the Nyakyusa proper, the Kukwe, the Ndali, the Ngonde, the Mahasi, the Kisi, the Pangwa, and the Bena came from a place Ilongo (in the present Bena country) which they call 'the dark house' (*nyumba nditu*), and the Penja speak of a centre of dispersion, Kina, to the north of Rungwe mountain, from which they and the Safwa and Poroto came. The people of Ngonde, for their part, trace connections with the Inamwanga and Iwa, saying that their chiefs in their journeyings left sons to rule these people; they also assert that one of their predecessors on the Lake-shore plain was a hunter from Fipa country.[3]

Despite these tenuous links with their eastern, northern, and north-western neighbours, the Nyakyusa and Ngonde people are, as we have said, culturally quite distinct from them. The Nyakyusa themselves are emphatic that their culture differs from the cultures of the Kinga, the Safwa, the Poroto, and the Nyika—a statement which our own observation, and the evidence of other writers, confirm.[4] And the Ngonde differ in many respects both

[1] R. de Z. Hall, 'Local Migration in Tanganyika', *African Studies*, 4 (1945). 2,100 families had moved before 1938; 3,000 by 1941.

[2] This is despite the fact that Swahili is the official vernacular for Tanganyika, being the medium of instruction in Government primary schools, and the language used by the Administration.

[3] Godfrey Wilson, op. cit., p. 10.

[4] E. Kootz-Kretschmer, *Die Safwa* (1926); J. Thomson, *To the Central African Lakes and Back* (1881), Vol. I, pp. 46–52; R. de Z. Hall, op. cit.; D. Kerr-Cross, op. cit.

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

CHAPTER XIII

TWENTY YEARS' CHANGE

How does Christianity interact with other revolutionary forces in the community? It has been possible to observe the changes that have taken place among the Nyakyusa after a lapse of twenty years, and a summary of them is necessary before we proceed to a discussion of the links between religious and secular change.

The first thing that strikes a visitor returning to Nyakyusa country after many years, is that the isolation, which was so typical of the valley, has greatly diminished. Buses, filled with Nyakyusa passengers, cross twice daily the high pass that leads out of the valley, and where once travellers died of exposure and starvation there is a hard road fringed with homesteads and fields. The belt of unoccupied country that even twenty years ago separated the Nyakyusa from their neighbours has disappeared, for they themselves have spilled out of the valley to the north and west, and their Kinga neighbours have come down the Livingstone escarpment to the east and cultivate the mountain slopes, for 'they no longer fear that people (i.e. the Nyakyusa) will seize their property'. Men travel abroad to find work and they go much farther and stay away longer than before. In the remotest village there is some man who has visited Burma or Malaya as a soldier, and a dozen lads who will argue the relative merits of the Orange Free State gold mines and the Copper-belt as centres of employment. Many women now accompany their husbands to Rhodesia, or other parts of Tanganyika, and some travel to visit daughters or sisters. The older women enlarge on their journeys and joke about how fearful they used to be.

Travel implies learning another language, most often Swahili, but also Bemba and English and the pidgin of the gold and copper mines called Fanakalo. Thus intellectual isolation is disappearing along with the physical isolation. The numerous 'bush schools' which existed in the Nyakyusa valley in 1938, and at which many of those who attended never even learnt to read and write, have been largely replaced by mission primary schools, state-aided and inspected, and in these and the Native Authority primary and middle schools there are now 9,437 pupils, as against about 500

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955)1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

and try to understand the nature and reasons for change. Here, then, is a good opportunity for the study of social change – not only in land tenure as such, but also in village and family organisation, political authority and economic life.

II

The Nyakyusa are a Bantu people inhabiting the main part of the Rungwe District in southern Tanganyika, immediately to the north of Lake Nyasa. In 1948 they numbered about 199,000 in that District, but about 10,000 men were probably at the time temporarily absent from their homes and in employment in the mines and towns of the Rhodesias and South Africa (see Gulliver, 1957), whilst about 20,000 had migrated to live in the adjacent Mbeya District to the north.

The tribal area comprises a confined geographical basin surrounding the northern end of Lake Nyasa. It extends only about 40 miles from the tip of the lake at 1,550 feet above sea level to the Poroto Mountains in the north at 8,000 feet; and from east to west is only about 30 miles, from the almost sheer walls of the Livingstone Mountains (with peaks up to 10,000 feet) to the Ndali Highlands (rising to about 7,000 feet). There are therefore unusually large ecological differences within so small an area. Three major regions are to be distinguished: the "Northern Highlands" over about 4,500 feet, the low-lying "Lake Plains" in the south, and the "Central Region" in between. Everywhere rainfall is reliable and high, averaging at least 100 inches annually[1], and this amply compensates for a certain poverty and misuse of the soil, although (and particularly in the Central Region) it brings dangers of soil erosion. Except in the highest parts the banana is the staple food, supported by maize, beans, finger millet and groundnuts. In the Northern Highlands coffee has become well established as the principal cash crop: in the Lake Plains paddy rice cultivation provides both a food and a cash crop: in the Central Region the country is too low generally for coffee and too high and dry for rice; consequently cash-cropping is considerably inferior and the people's standard of living is rather poorer.

The Nyakyusa and their country tended for a long time to be relatively isolated from the outside world by high mountain walls and rain-soaked roads. In addition, or because of it perhaps, they developed an almost unique culture which was supported by considerable conservatism and high insularity. They still continue to regard their African neighbours beyond the mountains as their social and cultural inferiors. The turmoil of the slave-trade in Central Africa passed them by; in modern times they have not enthusiastically accepted Christianity and they have refused to take up the use of Swahili, the Territorial *lingua franca*. In recent years, and most especially since the end of World War II, they have, however, accepted and pushed forward with vigour a rapid and extensive economic development, involving particularly the production of coffee and paddy as cash crops, and large-scale labour migration to the south in the high-wage mining industries. The multiplicity of petty, often tiny, independent chiefdoms has been reorganised to provide four local government areas, each under a Rural Council, in which the old chiefdoms have become something like parishes[2]. Although much of the old conservatism and narrow parochialism persists, yet there is now an atmosphere of accepted change, of a keen desire for economic development, and a general acceptance of a cash economy.

Probably the most significant feature of modern life in the Nyakyusa country is the increasing scarcity of land for agriculture in relation to the

1. At Tukuyu, in the Northern Highlands, annual rainfall averaged 99.28 inches between 1919 and 1952: at Kyela, in the Lake Plains, the average between 1940 and 1951 was 106.21 inches.
2. See Kingdon, Z.E.: The initiation of a system of local government by African rural councils in the Rungwe District, Tanganyika; *The Journal of African Administration*, iii, 4, October, 1951.